GUIDE 03

Responsibilities or Results? How Senior Evidence Is Read

Why strong senior records look less proven than they are, and what that costs senior data and AI professionals in the GCC.

03

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For senior data and AI professionals in the GCC

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The cases in this guide are composites built from patterns observed across many careers. None describes a real individual.

INTRODUCTION

Two CVs, one programme

Two senior data leaders worked on the same large programme at the same institution. Both played a significant part in it. Both moved on within a year of each other, and both listed the programme on their CVs.

The first wrote that she had been responsible for the programme's data workstream, overseeing data standards, quality and governance across several business units. The second wrote about what the programme had changed: what the business could now do, how much faster it could do it, and what leadership had said about the result.

Both descriptions were accurate. Only one of them gave a reader something to assess. The second leader was shortlisted for two senior roles that year. The first, whose contribution had arguably been larger, heard nothing.

This guide is about that difference: between describing what you were responsible for and showing what changed because you were there. It covers how senior readers look for evidence, four patterns that weaken evidence at senior level, and why experienced professionals often find their evidence harder to show than people earlier in their careers.

As in Guide 02, the emphasis is on consequences: what each pattern costs, and why. It does not set out how to rebuild your evidence, because that depends entirely on your own record and what can be supported. What it will do is help you recognise where your evidence currently sits.

Each chapter opens with a short case. These are composites built from patterns seen across many careers. None describes a real individual.

CHAPTER 1

How senior evidence is read

COMPOSITE CASE

A group chief executive was reviewing a shortlist of five candidates for a senior data role. Each CV ran to three pages. He gave each one about two minutes before the interviews.

Afterwards, he explained what he had been looking for. Not titles, which all looked similar. Not lists of responsibilities, which he skipped. He was looking for anything that told him what had changed in an organisation because this person had been there. Two of the five CVs gave him that. The other three, he said, "told me what job they had, not what they did with it".

Senior readers are not reading CVs and profiles the way the writer imagines. They are scanning for proof, quickly, and they are discounting everything that looks like a claim.

Claims and evidence

Every senior profile is full of claims. Led, managed, oversaw, delivered, transformed. These words are almost universal, which is exactly why readers have learned to look past them. A claim tells the reader what the writer wants them to believe. It does not tell them whether to believe it.

Evidence is different. It gives the reader something they can weigh: a change that happened, a result that can be measured, an outcome that someone else would recognise. The more of that a reader finds, the more confidently they can place the candidate. The less they find, the more they fall back on assumptions, and those assumptions rarely favour the candidate.

The evidence ladder

A useful way to think about this is as a ladder with four rungs. Each rung gives the reader more to rely on than the one below it.

A claim states a role or an activity. It establishes that you were there.

A described outcome says what changed. It establishes that something happened because you were there.

A measured outcome puts a scale on the change. It lets the reader judge how much it mattered.

A confirmed outcome is one that someone else would recognise or attest to: a sponsor, a regulator, a board, a client. It lets the reader trust the change without taking your word for it.

AN ILLUSTRATION

1	CLAIM	*"Led the enterprise data quality programme."*
2	DESCRIBED OUTCOME	*"Led the enterprise data quality programme, improving the reliability of management reporting."*
3	MEASURED OUTCOME	*"…reducing reporting errors by a clear, measured margin within a year."*
4	CONFIRMED OUTCOME	*"…an improvement recognised by both the executive committee and the external auditor."*

Illustrative only, and deliberately generic. Which rung a real achievement can reach, and how it should be expressed, depends entirely on an individual's record and what can be supported.

Why the top rung matters most at senior level

At earlier career stages, a described or measured outcome is usually enough. At senior level, readers increasingly look for the fourth rung, because senior hires are expensive, visible and hard to reverse. A result that a sponsor, a board or a regulator would recognise carries far more weight than one only the candidate can vouch for. It is also the rung that senior profiles reach least often.

Where most senior profiles sit

In my experience, most senior profiles in this market sit on the first rung, with occasional steps onto the second. That is not because the people behind them lack results. It is because, for most of their careers, nobody asked them to show results in this way. Their employers knew what they had done.

The external market does not know. It only knows what it can see, and it reads what it can see at face value.

The consequence

A profile that stays on the lower rungs forces the reader to guess. Senior readers, under time pressure and with other candidates to consider, tend to guess conservatively. Strong candidates are assumed to be average, and candidates whose evidence is visible move ahead of them, even when their underlying record is weaker.

CHAPTER 2

Responsibilities without results

COMPOSITE CASE

A Head of Data and Analytics with nineteen years' experience was competing for a senior role against a candidate with eleven. On paper, he had more scope, more seniority and more programmes behind him.

His CV listed twelve areas of responsibility under his current role. The other candidate's listed four results, each with a clear before and after. The hiring panel chose the less experienced candidate. One panel member explained that they knew exactly what the second candidate could do, and "had to take the first one's word for it".

The most common evidence pattern at senior level is a profile built from responsibilities. It describes the scope of each role in detail and says very little about what happened within that scope.

Why it happens

Responsibility-based profiles are a natural result of how many professionals write about their work. Job descriptions are written as lists of responsibilities. Performance objectives are often framed the same way. Internal promotions rarely require anyone to prove results to outsiders. Over twenty years, describing a role by its responsibilities becomes a habit.

It also feels safer. Responsibilities are facts. Results can feel like boasting, or like claims that might be challenged. Many senior people, particularly those from institutional backgrounds, are more comfortable understating than overstating.

How it is read

A list of responsibilities tells the reader what a person was trusted with. It does not tell them what the person did with that trust. The reader is left with two possibilities: the person achieved a great deal and has not said so, or the person achieved little and has nothing to say. Without evidence, the reader cannot tell which, and the safer assumption is the second.

The longer the list, the stronger this effect becomes. A dense page of responsibilities can read as someone who has held many roles without changing much in any of them.

Why seniority makes it worse

This pattern becomes more damaging as seniority rises, not less. Senior roles have broad scope, so the list of responsibilities grows longer with each promotion. At the same time, readers expect senior candidates to show enterprise-level outcomes. The gap between what is listed and what is expected widens with every step up, and a profile that worked well at Manager level can actively work against its owner at Head of Function or C-level.

The consequence

The costs are specific and recurring. Experienced candidates lose to less experienced ones whose results are visible. Senior professionals are assessed on their titles rather than their impact, which places them alongside everyone else with similar titles. And in interviews, they spend their limited time establishing what they achieved, time that better-evidenced candidates spend discussing what they would do next.

CHAPTER 3

The right work in the wrong language

COMPOSITE CASE

A data leader at a regional bank had built the data foundation that made the bank's regulatory reporting faster, more accurate and far less expensive to produce. It also made the bank's first analytics products possible, because the data was finally trustworthy.

Her CV described the work as "ensuring adherence to regulatory data requirements and maintaining controls across the reporting lifecycle". Every word was accurate. A private-sector hiring executive read it as a control function, and assumed the work had been about avoiding penalties. The value it had created was never visible.

Some senior profiles do contain real outcomes. The problem is the language they are written in. The work created value, but the description speaks only of control, obligation and governance duty.

Where this language comes from

A great deal of senior data work in the GCC and beyond was shaped by regulation over the past fifteen years. Regulators raised expectations on data quality, reporting and risk aggregation, and organisations invested heavily in meeting them. The professionals who led that work learned to describe it in the language of the regulator: requirements met, controls in place, obligations satisfied.

That language was right for its original audience. Internal committees, auditors and regulators wanted to hear it. The difficulty is that the next employer is usually a different audience, and is reading for something else.

How it is read

As Guide 02 describes, many senior buyers in the region are now purchasing value creation rather than control. When they read evidence written in the language of obligation, they translate it in a predictable way. Requirements met becomes "avoided problems". Controls maintained becomes "kept things running". The reader sees cost avoided rather than value created, even where the same work produced both.

This pattern is distinct from the one in Chapter 2. A responsibility-based profile is missing evidence. A profile in the wrong language has the evidence, but expresses it in a way that hides what it is worth. Many senior profiles show both patterns at once.

A regional layer

In government and sovereign entities across the GCC, the language of obligation is often reinforced by the way mandates are framed. Work is described in terms of directives, frameworks and requirements, because that is how it was commissioned and governed. Professionals who move from these entities into the private sector, or into organisations with a commercial agenda, often carry that language with them, and find that it reads very differently to their new audience.

The consequence

Professionals in this position are often among the most frustrated in the market, because they know they delivered significant value and cannot understand why it is not recognised. The consequence is that genuinely strong evidence is discounted, and the candidate is placed in the control and governance category described in Guide 02, with the narrower range of roles that comes with it.

CHAPTER 4

AI on the label, not in the work

> **COMPOSITE CASE**
>
> A senior analytics leader, concerned that his experience looked dated, updated his profile. His headline now described him as an AI and data transformation leader. His summary referred to machine learning, generative AI and AI strategy.
>
> He was quickly invited to interview for a senior AI role at a large government-related entity. Twenty minutes into the conversation, the hiring executive asked him to describe an AI system he had taken into production, and what it had changed. He had not taken one into production. The interview ended politely. His profile, he later learned, had been mentioned unfavourably in a conversation between two people he hoped to work with.

As AI has moved to the centre of the data agenda, many experienced professionals have felt pressure to show that they are part of it. The most common response is to add AI terms to a profile. Where real delivery sits behind those terms, that is entirely appropriate. Where it does not, it creates one of the most damaging evidence patterns in the market.

Why it happens

The pressure is understandable. Senior professionals see AI in almost every job description and every strategy document. They worry, often rightly, that a profile without AI language will be filtered out or read as out of date. Adding the language feels like a reasonable way to stay relevant.

The difficulty is that the language raises an expectation the evidence cannot meet.

Enabling AI is not the same as delivering it

A subtler version of this pattern affects many genuinely capable leaders. Senior data professionals often play an important part in AI programmes without building AI themselves. They provide the data foundations, the governance that makes AI usable, the sponsorship or the funding. That contribution is real and valuable. Problems arise when it is described as delivering AI rather than enabling it.

Experienced readers draw this distinction quickly. A leader who describes enabling work accurately is read as credible and relevant. A leader who describes the same work as building AI is read, once the question is asked, as overstating.

Why GCC buyers notice

Senior decision-makers in the region are not naive buyers of AI. Many organisations are running significant AI programmes, often linked to national strategies, and the executives leading them have spent considerable time with vendors, consultants and candidates making AI claims. They have learned to ask the follow-up question: what did you build, what did it do, and who uses it now?

A candidate whose AI language is not supported by delivery is usually exposed within one conversation. Often it takes one question.

Why the damage spreads

The consequence of this pattern goes beyond losing one role. Once a reader has found one claim that does not hold, they reasonably begin to doubt the others. Strong, genuine evidence elsewhere on the profile is discounted along with the unsupported claim.

Because senior communities in the GCC are relatively small, the impression can also travel. A candidate who overclaimed in one conversation may find that reputation arriving ahead of them in the next.

Under-claiming is not the answer either

Some professionals, wary of overclaiming, respond by removing AI from their profile altogether, including work that genuinely involved it. That creates the opposite problem: relevant experience becomes invisible, and the profile drifts towards the pattern described in the next chapter. The aim in a reader's eyes is accuracy, neither more nor less than the delivery supports.

The consequence

The irony of this pattern is that it is usually adopted to reduce risk, and ends up increasing it. A profile with modest but genuine AI evidence is read as credible. A profile with ambitious but unsupported AI language is read as unreliable, and credibility, once lost, is far harder to rebuild than relevance.

CHAPTER 5

When experience reads as a previous era

COMPOSITE CASE

A data warehousing and business intelligence leader had spent two decades building systems that large organisations still relied on. Her experience in data modelling, integration and data quality was exactly what many modern AI programmes struggle with.

Her profile, however, was written in the vocabulary of the platforms and methods she had used over those years. A younger hiring manager, building a modern data platform, read it as experience from a previous era, and assumed she would be more comfortable maintaining older systems than building new ones. He never discovered how relevant her experience was.

Data and AI technology has changed substantially over the last decade, and the vocabulary has changed with it. Experience that remains deeply relevant can be read as dated simply because of how it is described.

How it is read

Readers use the tools, platforms and methods named in a profile as a quick signal of how current a candidate is. A profile dominated by older names, with nothing to suggest familiarity with the current landscape, is read as belonging to an earlier period.

That reading carries assumptions. The reader wonders whether the candidate has kept up, whether they would be comfortable with modern approaches, and whether they would bring old habits into a new environment. None of these may be true. All of them are common inferences.

Why vocabulary matters more than it should

Part of this pattern is mechanical. Researchers and recruiters search using the terms of the current market, and applicant tracking systems filter on them. A profile written entirely in older vocabulary may never appear in those searches, however relevant the experience behind it. The pattern described in Guide 01, of strong candidates who are simply never found, applies here too.

What this is and is not about

This pattern is about description, not about age or length of experience. Many of the most valuable people in modern data and AI programmes have long careers, precisely because the hardest problems, such as data quality, integration, ownership and trust, have not changed as much as the tools around them.

It is also distinct from the pattern in Chapter 4. The answer to looking dated is not to add language that the evidence cannot support. That simply exchanges one problem for a more damaging one.

The consequence

Experienced professionals affected by this pattern are often filtered out of the roles where their experience would be most valuable. Their record is read as history rather than as foundation, and the organisations that most need what they know never find out.

CHAPTER 6

Why evidence is harder for senior people

> **COMPOSITE CASE**
>
> A senior leader with fifteen years at a sovereign investment entity was asked, in an early conversation with a private-sector group, to describe the impact of her work. She hesitated. Most of the figures were confidential. Most of the outcomes had been delivered by teams she led rather than by her personally. Several of the biggest benefits had materialised after she had moved to a new role. And for much of the work, nobody had ever measured the result.
>
> She knew her contribution had been significant. She could not easily show it.

It is natural to assume that evidence becomes easier to show as a career progresses. In practice, the opposite is often true. Senior professionals face specific obstacles that people earlier in their careers rarely encounter.

Confidentiality

Senior work often involves information that cannot be shared: financial figures, strategic programmes, government initiatives, investment outcomes. This is especially true in government and sovereign entities across the GCC. Professionals in these roles are, rightly, cautious about what they disclose, and the result is often a profile with almost no specific evidence at all.

Team outcomes

At senior level, results are delivered through others. A Head of Function may have shaped a programme's direction, secured its funding and removed its obstacles, while a team carried out the work. Many senior professionals feel uncomfortable claiming those results as their own, and so they claim nothing, which leaves the reader unable to see their contribution.

Timing

The benefits of senior work often arrive long after the work itself. A data foundation built over two years may enable outcomes in the third and fourth, by which time its architect may have moved on. Those outcomes rarely make it onto the architect's profile.

Measurement

Much senior data work was never measured in terms an outsider would recognise. The organisation knew it mattered, and nobody needed a number. Years later, the professional has a clear sense of the value and no figure to point to.

How the obstacles combine

Each of these obstacles is manageable on its own. Together, they compound. A senior leader may have confidential results, delivered through a team, that materialised after they left and were never measured. Faced with all four at once, many simply describe the role and move on. The record that results is accurate, cautious and almost entirely unconvincing to someone who does not already know the person.

This is also where the patterns in this guide meet. Professionals who cannot show results fall back on responsibilities. Those who sense that responsibilities are not enough sometimes reach for language, including AI language, that the evidence cannot support. Both are understandable responses to the same underlying difficulty.

The consequence

These obstacles mean that senior professionals frequently under-evidence their work more than people earlier in their careers, even though their work has had greater impact. The result is a market in which the most experienced candidates often look less proven than they are. Whether, and how, each of these obstacles can be overcome depends on the individual record, and on what can be shown responsibly.

CHAPTER 7

What this means for you

The patterns in this guide all leave a reader with less to rely on than the record deserves. Responsibilities in place of results. Real value described as control. AI language that the delivery cannot support. Relevant experience described in the vocabulary of an earlier era. And the specific obstacles that make senior evidence harder to show.

Each carries consequences: being assessed on title rather than impact, losing to less experienced candidates, being placed in narrower roles, and, in the case of overclaiming, damaging credibility that took years to build.

Do you recognise any of these patterns?

The questions below are not a diagnosis. They are a way of noticing where your evidence currently sits.

- [ ] Thinking of your current role, which rung of the evidence ladder does your profile reach for your most important achievement?
- [ ] Does your profile list more responsibilities than results?
- [ ] Are your achievements described mainly in terms of requirements met, controls maintained or obligations satisfied?
- [ ] If someone asked about every AI term on your profile, could you point to delivery behind each one?
- [ ] Would a reader building a modern data platform recognise your experience as relevant to what they are building?

- [ ] Have confidentiality, team delivery or the absence of measurement left your most significant work largely invisible?
- [ ] Have you lost out to candidates with less experience than you, without a clear explanation?

If several of these felt familiar, that is common among senior professionals in this market. It usually means the record is stronger than the way it is currently shown.

Where this fits

This guide covers Proof & Credibility, one of the four pillars in the Senior Career Positioning Benchmark. The others are Positioning & Narrative, Market Visibility, and Market Leverage & Direction. Evidence underpins the others: it is what makes a narrative believable and gives decision-makers the confidence to act on what they find.

Recognising the pattern is the starting point. Deciding which achievements can be evidenced, how far up the ladder each can go, and how to show it responsibly is specific to each record. If you want help applying this to your own record, the Benchmark is where that starts. If you have already taken it, re-read your Proof & Credibility result with this guide in mind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Kaleem has spent over 25 years across JP Morgan, UBS and ADIA, with 360-degree GCC recruitment experience on both the hiring and candidate side. He now works with senior data and AI professionals on how they are positioned, evidenced and found in the GCC market.

He is the creator of the Senior Career Positioning Benchmark, a structured self-assessment for senior data and AI leaders based in the GCC or targeting a move to it.

This guide provides general information only. The case studies are composites built from patterns observed across many careers; they do not describe real individuals. The illustration in Chapter 1 is generic and is not a template. Nothing in this guide creates recruitment representation, provides access to vacancies, or guarantees interviews, offers, salary outcomes or employment.

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